

The Source and Office of a Church Literature.

A
SERMON,

PREACHED BY APPOINTMENT AT THE 12TH ANNIVERSARY

OF THE MARYLAND BRANCH

OF THE

EVANGELICAL KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY

IN

ST. PETER'S CHURCH, BALTIMORE, MAY 30, 1860,

BY THE

REV. NOAH HUNT SCHENCK,

RECTOR OF EMMANUEL CHURCH.

BALTIMORE:

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Baltimore, May 31, 1860.

REV. NOAH HUNT SCHENCK:

Rev. and dear Brother:

The undersigned having heard your Sermon before the Maryland Branch of the Evangelical Knowledge Society with much pleasure and entire approbation, would be obliged to you to furnish a copy of it for publication.

THOS. G. ADDISON.

CHAS. R. HOWARD.

M. M. DILLON.

W. W. SPEAR.

E. H. HARLOW.

J. T. HOFF.

J. W. CHESLEY.

ROBERT PIGGOTT.

C. M. BUTLER.

W. T. LOCKWOOD.

JOSHUA MORSELL.

HENRY J. KERSHAW.

HENRY W. WOODS.

M. MACFARLAND.

CHAS. SEYMOUR.

To the

REV. THOS. G. ADDISON AND OTHERS:

My dear Brethren:

I herewith send you a copy of the Discourse preached by appointment at the recent Anniversary of the Maryland Branch of the Evangelical Knowledge Society. In thus complying with your invitation, I indulge the hope that the publication of this Sermon may, with God's blessing, conduce to the maintenance of those principles which are dear to us as Evangelical Churchmen, and as advocates of a free Christian Literature.

I am, &c. very affectionately,

Your brother in Christ,

NOAH HUNT SCHENCK.

BALTIMORE, *June* 6, 1860.

Baltimore, June 6th, 1860.

To the

REV. NOAH HUNT SCHENCK:

Rev. and dear Brother:


At an adjourned meeting of the Maryland Branch of the Evangelical Knowledge Society, on Thursday last, on motion of Rev. Wm. Spear, D. D., it was unanimously "Resolved, that the thanks of this Society be and are hereby tendered to the Rev. N. H. Schenck, for the Sermon preached at its anniversary on the Evening of May the 30th, in St. Peter's Church."

It gives me great pleasure, my dear Brother, to communicate to you the above Resolution.

Yours affectionately and truly,

C. R. HOWARD,

Secretary of Md. Branch of the E. K. Society.



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S E R M O N .

Isaiah xxxiii, 6.—AND WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE SHALL BE THE STABILITY OF THY TIMES AND STRENGTH OF SALVATION.

IF the gospel resources are adequate to the spiritual necessities of a single man, they are adequate to the necessities of all men. The first soul wafted to heaven on the wing of Christian faith, demonstrated at once the practical and the catholic character of the plan of Salvation. He, who would not that any should perish, makes distinct avowal, in the possibility of individual salvation, the possibility of universal salvation. We are to behold in the thousands rejecting Christ and plunging to death, not the insufficiency of God's wisdom and power in redemption, but the blindness and inertness of man, who, under the world's spiritual economy, is made the executive arm in redemption. There was enough light in Adam's day, reflecting from the promise of the triumphant "seed," to guide all men back to the re-opened door of heaven. There was enough light in Abraham's day kindled at the altar on Moriah

or flashing from the Covenant, to make bright the path opened up for all, from the sin stained earth to the pure heaven above it. There is a broad meridian illumination now, when life and immortality are brought to light in the glorious gospel of the Son of God, ample for the guidance of all the sons and daughters of earth, if they will but practically recognise individual obligation and the great law of neighborship, in which they stand so responsibly related to each other. A candid review of the history of operative truth, a fair contemplation of the present working of evangelizing agencies, must satisfy all thoughtful and prayerful men that the resources of the gospel have as yet been but very partially developed. As a reflection of its great original, we must behold the gospel as "perfect in its parts and properties." How idle, then, the thought, that there has been in the past, that there is in the present, any inadequacy to the purposes of universal evangelization in that system of salvation which our common Father submits for the acceptance of all his children. Before this great fact, we sink in sorrow and shame,—sorrow, that in the past so little has been done by man for God's glory in salvation; shame, that we are so inactive in adapting the gospel to the work of the soul, so reluctant to wield the moral forces presented for our use. If it

be true, and who dare deny it, that there is an earth-wide empire to be won by man for his Redeemer, and if it be equally true that the munitions of this warfare are all prepared in the gospel arsenal, ready for man to grasp and use them, and if it be also true that the victorious march of saving truth is only stayed because men will not buckle on the whole armor of God,—we come back to the Church and come back to its individual members, and gravely ask in view of our awful responsibility to God and man, whether we may not take measures to urge on the lagging march of truth, extend the area of spiritual liberty, occupy many broad acres of that land which remains to be possessed.

The time has come, has fully come, when all true and earnest men should address themselves with concentrated moral energy to the solution of the great *problem of world-wide salvation*. We have already seen that there can be no dispute about the agencies to be employed. Every development of energy, whether in the intellectual, social or moral world, is of God, designed to subserve the great ends of salvation. Thus, the discovery and application of the principle of the expansive power of steam, enables men, missionary men, to “run to and fro in the earth;” and the discovery of the art of printing has proved a great power by which “know-

ledge," evangelical knowledge, has been "increased." The most careless reader of history can not but have observed that the power of steam and the power of the press have been vitalized of God, and adapted to the necessities of the moral world; nay, whether the history of the last two centuries does not disclose the blessing of God as resting more upon the printed page than the spoken word, not, it may be, in the matter of personal salvation, but in the work of preparing the way for the entrance of the truth of Christ. And has not steam, during the half century that its marvellous powers have been patent to the world, done more indirectly, by affording facilities for the diffusion of Christianity, than the Churches have directly. Thus exhibiting, not only that God is creating constantly new channels through which his "way may be known upon earth, his saving health among all nations," but that, just in proportion as man develops the agencies in the material world and lays hold of the forces locked up in the various forms of matter, in that same proportion shall "knowledge be increased" and men be saved. And moreover, that the Church is not to rely upon "doing the Church's work in the Church's way," if that means that it is only to move on in the directions marked out in past centuries, but that it must lay hold upon every new development in the intellectual

and material world, and apply them to evangelizing uses, if it would advance the cause of truth; and as it uses steam and the press, so must it learn farther of the "children of this world," if it would make them all, under God's blessing, to be "children of the light."

But are there not signs in the heavens indicated to us by the finger of prophecy, are there not marvels upon earth disclosed to us by the hand of progress, which teach us lessons of present and imperative duty? The nineteenth century has done more to develop intellect, and adapt energy and diffuse knowledge, than, I was about to say, all the centuries combined, but certainly more than has been done in twice the number of years in any of the preceding centuries. Has there been a *pari passu* development and adaptation and diffusion in matters pertaining to the kingdom of Christ upon earth? I fear not. Nay, I may venture to say that the progress of evangelization is sadly disproportioned to the progress of mind and society in this age of unexampled advancement. In view of this present relation of the Church to the world, we submit that the word in season to the Church, the gospel adapted to the present exigency of its life and work, is that which we have selected as our text from the record of the Evangelical Prophet, "And wisdom and

knowledge shall be the stability of thy times and strength of salvation."

Up to the present day in the Church's history, there has certainly never been a period when this Scripture has had so pertinent an application. The principle that "might makes right" has ceased to obtain in the civilized governments of the earth, and the other principle, that "knowledge is power," has to a good degree taken its place, either as a growing sentiment or an enthroned reality. This is, to a greater or less extent, true of Church organizations under the benign influence of Protestantism. All right minded men, that is, all men who have escaped from the trammels of bigotry in religion, and so called "legitimacy" in politics, warmly espouse the inevitable truth that "wisdom and knowledge are the stability of our times and strength of salvation."

The converse of this proposition has been amply demonstrated since the epoch of the Saviour. The history of the Christianized world during the mediæval times, when "wisdom" was not sought through the prayer of faith, and "knowledge" was rigidly guarded from the common mind, sufficiently attests that there can be no "stability" to religious institutions, no "strength" in measures for individual salvation, except upon the conditions of invoked

“wisdom” and diffused “knowledge.” Now, my argument is, that as the present elevation of the science of government and society is clearly resultant from the diffusion of “knowledge” by those agencies which the wit of man has devised, swayed to right ends, as we must suppose, by a “wisdom” imparted of God, so should we subsidize every honest agency for diffusing a “knowledge” of revealed truth, energize in faithful and importunate prayer for the gift of “wisdom,” that by these appliances may be secured the strongholds of our faith, may be strengthened and expanded our efforts in individual salvation. Satan has not been slow to avail himself of these multiplied facilities for “running to and fro in the earth,” and having “knowledge increased.” He has not failed in times and places, ah how many! to prostitute the press to the propagation of damning error, and to send his swift-wheeled trains hurling along the glancing rail with their messages of untruth, their freight of evil, and their passengers ticketed for the land of death. Social errors, errors in philosophy, and most of all, errors in religion, have thus been rapidly and widely disseminated, and the Church is now invoked by the victims of German infidelity and Italian priestcraft, of a cold ecclesiasticism, and a radical antinomianism, to be, at least, as active in spreading the truth, as is its great enemy in attempting to subvert it.

But I would not be understood as avowing, in what I have already submitted of the Church's comparative inertness, that there has been no putting forth of fresh energy since the world awoke from the sleep of the dark ages. New measures have been inaugurated, many and powerful, as compared with the regimen of the Church in previous ages, but few and weak, as contrasted with what may and should be instituted in view of the increased facilities provided in the world, and the increased activity of the powers of darkness. We have in the modern Church a re-organization of Christian Missions; a large and increasing multiplication of copies of Holy Scripture, through the art of printing; we have benevolent enterprises, both upon the voluntary and the ecclesiastical basis; a development of practical Christian Union in the great publishing Societies, in the Young Men's Christian Association, and in the Union Prayer Meeting; we have the Tract, the Religious Newspaper, and the Colporteur, and last, though probably well nigh first in importance, an awakened interest in the spiritual relations of little children, chiefly manifested in what is now regarded as next to the missionary work, the chief arm of strength to the Church, the Sunday School. All these are new fields of usefulness, and involve new and varied exercises of spiritual energy, and look to

certain results of great consequence to the cause of Christ, under the blessing of the Spirit. But as “wisdom and knowledge” are declared to be the “stability” of these institutions, and the “strength” of their proposed “salvations;” and as this knowledge is flowing forth in these times chiefly through the channel of printing, so are we appealed to as watchmen in Zion, as sentinels at the door of hearts, to exercise our office especially with reference to the religious press, establishing over it a spiritual censorship to the end that the light of the press be not darkness, but that it shine into all hearts a “knowledge” of the truth, a knowledge which maketh “wise unto salvation.” Only by adapting, by means of the press, the eternal word to the changing circumstances of intellectual and moral life—even as we adapt that word in preaching,—by presenting to the edacious mind of our age a religious literature which we know by warrant of scripture to be pure and wholesome, purged from all that is merely rationalistic and ceremonial and glowing with spiritual life; only thus may we fulfil to our age and our Church the prophecy of the text: “And wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times and strength of salvation.”

And here the question emerges, *shall this be done by the Church aggregate or the Church individual*, by

the visible Church organic, or by individual and associated members of the body of Christ?

I. If this be raised as a question of *authority*, we go at once to our standards, (Art. XIX.) and there learn that the functions of the visible Church are confined to the preaching of the word and administration of the sacraments. It has, however, a conferred authority, as we are taught in Art. XX. to decree rites or ceremonies, and arbitrate in controversies of faith, (not decree,) and even here its authority is so nicely defined and so closely hedged in as to invite appeals from erroneous decisions to the inalienable right of private judgment; for, we read in the same Article, "it is not lawful for the Church to ordain anything that is contrary to God's word written, neither may it so expound one place of Scripture that it be repugnant to another. Wherefore, although the Church be a witness and a keeper of Holy Writ, yet, as it ought not to decree anything against the same, so besides the same, ought it not to enforce anything to be believed for necessity of salvation." Here are the boundaries and limitations of the visible Church's authority, an authority co-terminous with its obedience to the truth of Scripture, an authority delegated to it by its integral members, and which, when abused, to be instantly repudiated and traversed by all true and faithful Christian men,—for who are to be

the judges of the right action of a federal body, like the visible Church, but its confederated members. This is most manifestly the inferential teaching of the article on the Church's authority, a teaching necessitated not only by the conditions of visible Church existence, but by reason of man's fallibility, which is not purged out of his nature even when he is banded with his fellows in ecclesiastical relations. But aside from the terms and tenor of the article on Church authority, which is evidently so constructed as to guard against the exercise of offices which may militate against the conscience of any part of its faithful members, we sink the whole question before the incontrovertible Protestant truth, that *the visible Church has no specific authority except such as has been especially delegated to it.* And we therefore confidently assert, that as no specific authority has been conferred upon the Church enabling it to promulge and admeasure a religious literature, such authority may not be claimed or exercised.

And we do not find, in the *history* of the Christian Churches, any such assumption of authority, except in the Romish heresy, where the dogma of infallibility arrogates to the Church well nigh every function of both spiritual and civil government. Here and there, as we observe the tide setting Romeward in other Churches, we see this element of error

rising to the surface; but outside the pale of the Latin Church, I have yet to find in the history of the professed Christian Churches so bold a proposition for Church supervision and censorship in religious literature, as that which is practically avowed by a publishing Society in our own household of faith,—a Society which claims to feed the whole mind of our Church, and would have us all, willing or unwilling, take its publications and use them, and would have us reject what flows from the presses of other Societies as *prima facie* unauthoritative and defective; and all because this Society theorizes upon Episcopal supervision, and makes every Bishop *ex vi termini* a sinecure officer, whether he will or whether he will not. Such a pretension can never obtain universally in our Church until it ceases to be Protestant, and then it will no longer be our Church. Such a pretension can never be fully recognized by Christians until they consent to forego the exercise of the right of private judgment. Such a pretension can never usurp a place in the individual heart until the conscience is in some degree consigned to the care of ecclesiastical authority.

But taking men as we find them, in high places as well as in private stations, looking upon things as we observe them related in the Church and between the Church and the world, regarding the operative

life of ecclesiastical bodies in human society, gleaning from history, contemplating the present aspect of the moral world, and indulging an honest outlook into the unfolding future, can we say, dare we say that it is *expedient* to resign an engine of such vast moral power as the press to the sole administration of fallible Bishops and fluctuating Conventions. Reverently as I regard those who are called to stand in the positions of eminence in the Church, and loyal as I feel myself to be to the law of the Church in which I strive to serve and honor God, yet have I more reverence for the truth, yet am I more loyal to the cause of the soul and the soul's great Original. We are not to suppose that those superior in Church position are always superior in spiritual or intellectual power. We are not to suppose that fidelity to God and the soul always enhances proportionably to the increase of official dignity. We are not to suppose that those who are burdened with "the care of all the Churches" can, without Paul's inspiration, be especially qualified to feed and foster spiritual life in the individual heart. I am not, of course, arguing an *ex officio* disqualification in those who stand in the highest places of the Church, but I do argue that there is nothing in the circumstances of their position which qualifies them peculiarly to originate or mould a religious literature for the other members

of the Church. They have never as a body demonstrated such qualification. The tracts of such men as Legh Richmond and Ryle have done and are doing more to temper and strengthen the religious mind of the present century than all the pens of all the prelates. Nay, fetter the free mind and gushing heart with ecclesiastical restraints, guard the press with Episcopal censors, hedge it around with canons, let conventions and committees sit in judgment, and continue in critical controversy, over its every issue, and you will presently have a literature enervate and cold, distinguished only by its moral cowardice, its intellectual feebleness and its spiritual inanity. But worse than this, for fatal error is worse than this, we argue the *inexpediency* of entrusting the religious press to the ecclesiastical authority, because there are exigencies which have occurred, and which may again occur, in the administration of the visible church, when error preponderates in its counsels and legislations. At such times what is to become of the doctrine and the conscience of, it may be, a large minority of its members? In the early Church, should they have accepted the teachings of the Arians, under the domination of the principle we are discussing, there would have been an extinction for the time of Trinitarian truth. And so, what was it under God but the power of independent thought and speech which roused the

church from the trance-like torpor of the middle ages. If to the church we were to look for our religious literature, how the offerings of Edward's reign would have been consumed in the fires of Smithfield, to make place for expressions of the then Romanized sentiment of the church. Now, too, in our own age and in our own Church, if we were to tolerate the claim which is put forth for a religious literature wholly ecclesiastical, might we not directly be driven from the fold of our much-loved church, or be forced into the inconsistency of preaching to our people one system, and winking at their listening to another from the type-tongue of a tractarianized press.

But is not the recognition of such a claim directly at war with the avowed element of catholicity in the visible Christian church? Do we not profess to stand upon a platform of faith sufficiently wide for all true lovers of Christ? We embrace those who differ most widely upon questions of doctrine not essential to salvation. We even hold together in Catholic communion those entertaining strongly contrasted views on the great sacramental controversies. And may we now fetter thought and enslave conscience that a principle may be enthroned which was once protested out of the church, and which again is sought to be inoculated upon our body ecclesiastical, with virus

from the Vatican, and which if allowed “ample scope and verge enough” will not only cramp and stiffen every muscle in that body, but presently disintegrate its catholic whole and resolve it back to its elements. No, no. Our church both in its constitution and in its genius regards the conscience and freedom of all its members, and scorns to use the machinery of coercion. Remembering that it is “not by might nor by power, but by the Spirit,” that spiritual results are attained, its members, its loyal members, seek to win their erring brethren back to the old paths, the evangelical doctrine and practice, only by prayer and preaching and fraternal persuasion. Only thus may we adhere to the principles of Protestantism, only thus preserve to the church its Catholicity.

II. Having thus on the grounds of *authority, history and expediency* argued adversely to the church-aggregate undertaking to supply its members with a religious literature, we have left us, passing from a negative to a positive line of remark, to exhibit the manifest propriety of this duty being assumed and discharged by the church individual, by associated members of the “blessed company of faithful people.” This proposes that every Christian man who by his gifts or other environing circumstances is evidently qualified, should enlist in the effort to have “wisdom and knowledge become the stability of our

times and strength of salvation," through the agency of a spiritualized press.

I need not at this late day argue the obligation of individual effort. It involves a truth as old as the earthly age of sin. God looks upon men as isolated souls. Their responsibilities are mainly personal. No man may assume to answer for his fellow. The command is "go thou," and though men band together to accomplish by concerted effort what they might not accomplish by independent action, yet individual responsibility is never merged into associated responsibility. There is no abating of the debt of duty we owe to God and our fellow men by merely enrolling our names in organizations which propose to accomplish what we know is our personal business to seek to accomplish. So all true church work is, in its spirit, individual work after all. God so looks at it. Man must so give account of it. The highest functionary of the church and the most obscure of the followers of Christ are to stand together in the great day, and make response to the same question, and give account, not of the accidents of official life or of life obscure and comparatively irresponsible, but simply of "the deeds done in the body," as they have reflected or refracted the glory of God. The true members of Christ, they who are of the "blessed company of faithful people," penetrated

with a conviction of this truth, may enter the arena of godly effort opened before them by the art of printing, and labor alone or in companies, as the exigencies of time and place may require, assured that God will bless such labor now, even as he has been pleased to vouchsafe His blessing to it in days that are past.

And there is an ordained regimen for this department of the Lord's vineyard as for others, and which *must* be observed if success is to be attained. This is not only to be disclosed by studying the philosophy of Christian effort and obligation, to which we have first adverted, but also by recognizing the analogy of Gospel means of salvation, and the analogy of man's mind and heart. What I mean is that as the agencies defined in scripture for effecting regeneration and sanctification are not aggregate and general and indirect, but individual and specific and direct,—so may we suppose that the same law is to govern all newly developed agencies which God seems disposed to bless, as contributing to the same great ends. So if a religious literature is to be recognised of God as a sanctifying agency, we must have it go forth as free and untrammelled as that *word* whose truths it aspires to echo and the entrance of which giveth light; it must be as specific and direct in its character and its adaptation as that

preaching which it seeks to emulate, and which as borne from mouth to ear, from heart to heart, by individual to individual, is made to be the power of God to salvation. And moreover ; as man thinks as a unit and writes as a unit and feels as a unit, so does he only regard the analogy of his mental and emotional nature by preserving his individuality, when he would make the faculties of that nature contribute to God's glory in salvation ; and just in proportion as he merges that individuality does he impair the efficiency of his mental and moral efforts.

Strengthening and culminating the argument from the analogy subsisting or which should subsist between agencies divinely instituted and those of man's devising, let me say, that as the Bible is the effulgent and radiating centre as well as the focal point of all truly religious literature, and as Protestant Christendom is solemnly pledged to use the free press for diffusing this free gift of God to operate upon the free heart of man, under the direction of the free Spirit, so must all emanations and reflections of this "great light which has come into the world" be fledged for the same free flight, and permitted to cleave their illuminating way through earth's darkened air, bearing beneath their outstretched pinions messages of liberty to the captives of Satan, news of eternal freedom to those fast bound in sin.

Without extending further this line of remark, let me conclude what I have to say upon the *propriety and duty of voluntary action* as contrasted with ecclesiastical, in adapting the press to the purposes of religion, by asserting what I suspect no one will venture to deny, viz: that while individual Christians and voluntary associations have, by the press, done much in disseminating a "knowledge" of saving truth, and thus given "strength to salvation," every effort to subject the press to the constraints of church authority, has conduced to the development and spread of error in doctrine; and while failing to produce anything of practical importance to the cause of spiritual religion, has diverted the church from the track of evangelical effort to the dangerous ground of doctrinal controversy.

Thus, my Brethren, do I attempt to answer the question whether the effort to fulfil to our age and our church the prophecy of the text, in so far as a true religious literature may conduce to its fulfilment, should be undertaken by the church aggregate or the church individual. In offering you this expression of my deliberate and seriously matured judgment, I invite you to review with me the form and features of a great Christian obligation alike personal and pressing. As we recognize it anew, let us bend in prayer for that "wisdom" from above which is "first

pure, then peaceable” and “easy to be entreated.” As we enter with renewed vigor upon the labor it enjoins, let us be stimulated and cheered by the divine guarantee of the text, that evangelical “knowledge” may be made the “stability of our times,” and the “strength” of that “salvation” which we trust shall ere long girdle the globe.

While the main object I have had in view in this discourse has been to present the obligations of the gospel touching the right use of a Christianized press by Christianized men, I have not failed to hold distinctly before me the especial occasion of our assembling together, and with this also in view, have attempted to make my argument an apology for the “Protestant Episcopal Society, for the Promotion of Evangelical Knowledge.” It is without the purview of my present purpose to speak specifically of the organism or administration of this Society, neither have I space to run out the parallel between what I have submitted in my sermon and its distinctive principles and active operations. Suffice it that we are met to-night on this anniversary of the Maryland Branch of this Association, to blend in exercises of grateful devotion to the Great Head of the Church, who has been pleased to bless so abundantly our first associated effort to reduce to a practical reality the principles I have just attempted to eliminate, and to

discharge the duty I have now attempted to pourtray and enforce. A Society founded in faith, sustained through prayer, administered in love, resting on a platform of doctrine purely protestant and evangelical, loyal in its adhesion to and advocacy of the distinctive features of our Episcopal Church, designed for the promotion only of that knowledge which will make wise unto salvation and through twelve years of active work preserving an unbroken consistency in character and labor, a Society whose imprint has come to be a warrant of orthodoxy, whose publications are now with thousand tongues teaching and defending the truth in every quarter of the church and relieving the sterility of many a moral waste, where the voice of the living preacher is never heard—this society appeals to us to-night that we invoke for it more “wisdom,” not only to be received but also to be reflected, that we increase its facilities for the dissemination of evangelical “knowledge,” and that we look into its history that we may have mirrored back to us certain of the elements and outlines of that vast power which is, under God, yet to give a perfect “stability” to our religious institutions, and a resistless “strength” to the “salvation” of Jesus.
